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ABSTRACT

In 1989, staff from Rancho Santiago College's (RSC's) research office conducted telephone interviews with a random sample of 255 out of the 17,359 former students who attended RSC in spring 1989 but did not return for the next semester. The study was conducted to determine why students did not return, whether they accomplished their educational objectives while attending RSC, and how they assessed the college. Major findings of the survey were as follows: (1) 63% of the nonreturning students were White, 17% were Hispanic, and 15% were Asian; (2) the average age of the RSC students was 33; (3) 43% had a grade point average of 3.0 or higher; (4) 30% had only attended RSC for one semester, 19% had attended for two semesters, and 26% had attended for three or four semesters; (5) 67% worked 21 to 40 hours while at RSC; (6) only 13% of the respondents frequently used the library or student services, talked with an instructor, or went to the campus for some other purpose than to attend class; (7) 84% were not attending another college at the time of the survey; and (8) 19% did not return because of a conflicting work schedule, 16% due to family or personal problems, 13% for a medical reason, and 11% because they graduated or completed their objective. The survey instrument is appended. (JMC)

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Non-Returning Student Interview Study and RSC's Institutional Effectiveness

by Suzi Russell
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March 1990

JC 900 156

Institutional Research
Rancho Santiago Community College District

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Introduction

Members of Rancho Santiago College's 1988-89 Planning Council developed a plan with which to assess the institution's effectiveness. Included in that plan was a proposed study of non-returning students' opinions about RSC and their experiences at the college. Not only did staff want to know how former students assessed the college, but they also wanted to be able to address student drop-out concerns as they relate to institutional effectiveness.

In Fall 1989, staff from RSC's Research Office interviewed over the telephone a random sample of 255 (out of 17,359) former students who had attended RSC in the Spring semester of 1989 but did not return for the next semester. The purpose of the study was to determine 1) why students did not return, 2) whether they accomplished their educational objectives while attending RSC, and 3) how they assessed the college.

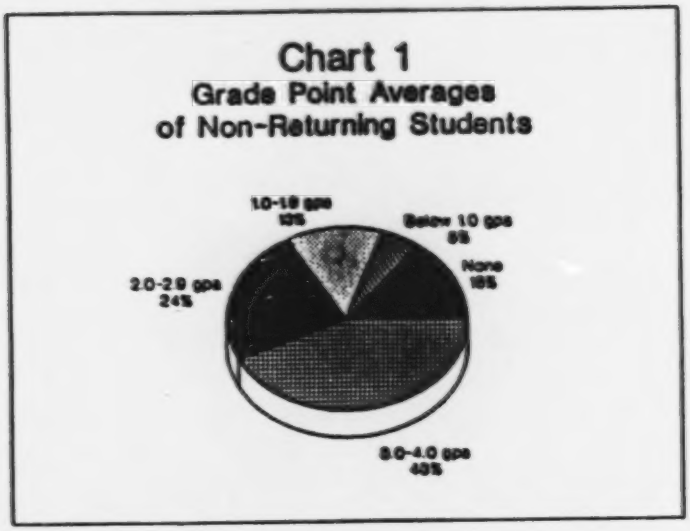
The appendix of this report includes tables showing the results of the interviews. Those results are summarized in an especially "user-friendly" approach on the following pages.

A Little About the Sample of Non-Returning Students...

- Their ethnic and age distributions are similar to those of all RSC students:
  - 63% are White
  - 17% are Hispanic
  - 15% are Asian

  - their average age is 33, but this differs by "purpose for attending"
  - 40% are between 21 and 30 years old
  - 28% are between 31 and 40 years old
  - only 11% are 20 or younger

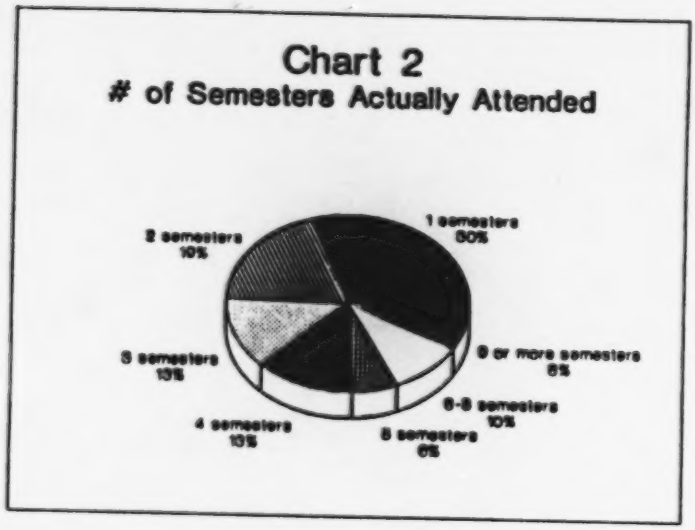
- Their academic records at RSC are mostly good:
  - their average g.p.a. is 2.3
  - 43% had a g.p.a. of 3.0 or higher
  - 24% had a 2.0 to 2.9 g.p.a.
  - however, 33% left with a D or F g.p.a. or no units completed



- The number of units completed at RSC by these students is as follows:

# units	%	# units	%
0	9%	21 - 40	19%
1 - 2	4	41 - 60	8
3 - 5	13	61 - 80	6
6 - 10	12	> 80	7
11 - 20	23	Average	26 units

- The largest number of students attended RSC for one semester:
  - 30% attended RSC for one semester
  - 19% attended two semesters
  - 26% attended three or four semesters
  - 24% attended more than four semesters
  - 3.7 was the average number of semesters attended



- Only a few were **not** employed during enrollment:
  - 67% worked 21 to 40 hours while at RSC
  - 15% worked 20 hours or less

- Most students did **not** come to the campus or stay on campus to do things other than attend classes:

  - 68% never did anything but attend classes
  - 13% **frequently** used the library or student services, talked with an instructor, or something else.

* * * **Involvement in on-campus activities has been found in other studies to correlate with student success and persistence.** * * *

- Most former students are **not** attending another college now:

  - 84% are not
  - 8% are attending another community college
  - 6% are attending a four-year college or university
  - 2% are attending another type of college

Why Didn't the Students Return to RSC?

Reasons Given:	%
Work schedule	19%
Family or personal problems	16%
Medical reason	13%
Graduated or completed objective	11%
Attending another college	10%
Desired classes not offered	10%
College too time-consuming	6%
Completed courses or personal interest	6%
Other	10%

Explanation:

This was an "open-ended" question; students were asked why they did not return, and their responses were later grouped. Response options were not provided, with the intent of receiving a more spontaneous response.

The reasons given are similar to the responses that are normally found in studies of non-returning community college students, who are usually in the workforce and/or have their own families to care for. That is, education is not always their first priority. These are reasons for which the community college itself can not be held accountable. The community college can attempt to provide support services and delivery systems that best accommodate these types of students, however.

It is also important to consider that these reasons provided may be those that the respondents believe will be the most acceptable and justifiable. The respondents may have lost interest in college for reasons that even the respondent has not identified. Motivational variables, which are very difficult to study, need to be considered and addressed as we know that many students manage to remain enrolled in spite of employment and family responsibilities.

Did the Students Accomplish Their Objectives?

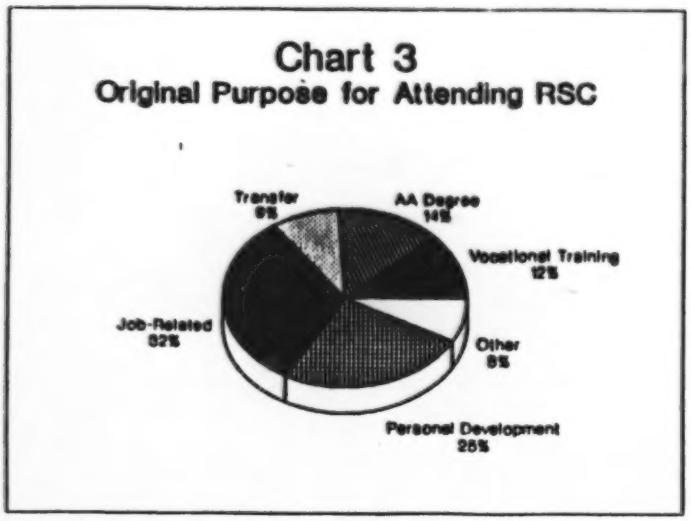
- 64% said "yes"
- 24% said "partially"
- 13% said "no"

- Of the 13% (n = 32) who said "no", what were their reasons?

  - 61% had conflicting work schedules, or family or personal problems
  - 17% said the class was not what they wanted or expected
  - 6% had medical problems

- Their reported original reasons for attending RSC fell into the following categories:

  - Job related - 32%
  - Personal development - 25%
  - A.A. degree - 14%
  - Vocational training - 12%
  - Transfer - 9%



- A.A. degree-goal students most frequently stated (49%) that they had only partially completed their goal.

- Of the 23 students who indicated "transfer" as an objective, 57% are no longer attending college, 13% are attending another community college, and 30% are attending a four-year college or university.

- Of the 31 students who indicated "vocational training" as an objective, 35% are now employed in a field related or partially related to their courses; 23% are not employed; and 42% are employed in unrelated fields.

* * * **Note**:

Tom Hayden defines "retention rate" in legislation he is currently drafting as the extent to which students continue in college toward or successfully complete their original educational objectives.

How Did the Students Assess Their RSC Experience?

- Students were asked to rate their experience at RSC from 1 to 10 and the average rating was 8.1. The rating distribution was as follows:

Rating	%
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	0
5	4%
6	7%
7	14%
8	37%
9	19%
10	19%

Students with an objective of receiving an A.A. degree gave RSC the highest average rating, 8.5.

- When asked if they would recommend RSC to their own children or to a friend:
  - 98% said "yes"
  - only 1% said "no"
  - 1% said "other"

- 70% responded that they plan to return to RSC in the future.

- 9% responded that some of their classes were too difficult for them, and 10% said that some were too easy. The classes named in both categories were extremely varied.

- Most often mentioned qualities of RSC included:

  - Good instructors and staff (32%)
  - Convenient location (27%)
  - Programs and services (19%)
  - Generally good (11%)

- Only a few provided suggestions for improvement for RSC, in the following areas:

  - Parking (8%)
  - Better student services (need tutors, more tutors, and job placement) (5%)
  - More courses at Orange (4%)
  - More night courses (4%)

Other Interesting Findings...

- While the average number of semesters attended was 3.7, the students responded that they had planned to attend an average of 3.2 semesters. Of the students who had planned to attend only one semester, 7% stayed for additional semesters.

- A large percentage of the students who were attending for personal development reasons were older, White, and have been attending RSC since prior to 1986.

- Of the non-returning students who had the objective to transfer to a four-year college, 43% reported that they are currently attending another college.

- Students who leave the college with no g.p.a. (no completed coursework) are most often "vocational training"-or "job related"-goal students, as opposed to "personal development", "transfer to a 4-year college", or A.A. degree students. Those vocational students, however, responded at high rates that they accomplished their educational objectives.

- Many students (43%) began attending RSC prior to 1986, suggesting that many students "stop-out" and many attend persistently but take a few units at a time. On the other hand, 24% of the students attended RSC for the first time in Spring 1989.

- Of the 20 students who are now attending another community college, five are attending Orange Coast College and five Fullerton College. Of the 15 attending a four-year college, seven are attending CSU, Fullerton.

- Transfer and A.A. degree purpose students are most often ethnic minority and have been assessed for course placement.

Conclusions:

- Reportedly, students most often stop attending RSC for reasons related to their employment, or personal or family life. These are reasons over which RSC has no control. RSC can, however, provide support services and flexible delivery of programs for these students.

- Former students are very pleased with their experiences at RSC, like the instructors, plan to return, and would recommend RSC to family and friends.

- Our students are extremely diverse in terms of academic performance, persistence, and demographic characteristics.

- It is somewhat of a contradiction that 64% of the respondents indicated that they accomplished their educational objectives, yet few students did indeed receive an A.A. degree or transfer to a four-year college, and 33% left with a D or F g.p.a. or no completed units. One conclusion that may be drawn from this set of statistics is that many community college students work persistently and slowly towards their educational goals (70% indicated that they plan to return to RSC).

- While RSC apparently met, or more than met, the expectations of students, staff will have to determine whether RSC is preparing students consistent with RSC's expectations and how to maximize that preparation for this diverse student population.

- Another potential conclusion is that student motivation to persist in college varies. Some students persist in spite of difficulties, which for other students lead to dropping out. Student motivation issues can be addressed by the college programmatically.

#52a/NRSIS
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Appendices

Non-Returning Student Interview Study
Distribution of Responses and Characteristics
by Purpose For Attending College

Interview Question/Student Characteristic	Students' Purpose for Attending College						TOTAL n=255
	Vocational Training n=31	A.A. Degree n=35	Transfer to 4-year n=23	Job-Related n=82	Personal Development n=63	Other n=21	
AGE							
16-20	7%	17%	26%	9%	8%	10%	11%
21-30	42	37	61	46	27	25	40
31-40	23	40	13	31	22	35	28
41-50	16	3	0	10	25	10	13
51-60	13	3	0	4	8	10	6
> 60	0	0	0	1	10	10	4
Average	35	29	25	32	38	38	33
ETHNICITY							
Black	3%	3%	0%	2%	0%	10%	2%
Asian	16	14	26	16	6	20	15
Hispanic	16	29	26	15	14	10	17
White	58	54	48	63	78	60	63
Other	7	0	0	4	2	0	2

Non-Returning Student Interview Study
Distribution of Responses and Characteristics
by Purpose For Attending College

Interview Question/Student Characteristic	Students' Purpose for Attending College						TOTAL n=255
	Vocational Training n=31	A.A. Degree n=35	Transfer to 4-year n=23	Job-Related n=82	Personal Development n=63	Other n=21	
DOES STUDENT HAVE TEST SCORES?							
Yes	32%	66%	61%	30%	18%	25%	35%
No	68	34	39	70	82	75	65
GRADE POINT AVERAGE							
None	29%	9%	4%	15%	11%	30%	15%
Below 1.0	3	9	4	4	6	5	5
1.0-1.9	10	14	9	11	19	10	13
2.0-2.9	16	49	44	21	13	20	24
3.0-4.0	42	20	39	50	51	35	43
Average	2.0	2.1	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.0	2.3

Non-Returning Student Interview Study
Distribution of Responses and Characteristics
by Purpose For Attending College

Interview Question/Student Characteristic	Students' Purpose for Attending College						
	Vocational Training n=31	A.A. Degree n=35	Transfer to 4-year n=23	Job-Related n=82	Personal Development n=63	Other n=21	TOTAL n=255
UNITS COMPLETED							
0	19%	6%	4%	9%	3%	20%	9%
1-2	7	0	0	3	10	5	4
3-5	26	6	9	7	16	20	13
6-10	7	3	4	12	22	10	12
11-20	3	14	17	36	22	25	23
21-40	20	29	13	16	21	5	19
41-60	7	11	22	9	3	0	8
61-80	7	17	17	3	0	10	6
81 or More	7	14	13	6	3	5	7
AVERAGE	22	41	41	24	17	19	26
FIRST SEM. AT RSC							
Sp.48-Sp.69	3%	0%	0%	5%	2%	5%	3%
Sp.70-F79	13	23	9	22	16	5	17
Sp.80-F85	10	26	35	20	27	25	23
Sp.86-F86	0	17	0	6	13	5	8
Sp.87-F87	10	11	26	6	8	15	10
Sp.88-F88	19	9	13	20	11	10	15
Sp.89	45	14	17	21	24	35	24

Non-Returning Student Interview Study
Distribution of Responses and Characteristics
by Purpose For Attending College

Interview Question/Student Characteristic	Students' Purpose for Attending College						TOTAL n=255
	Vocational Training n=31	A.A. Degree n=35	Transfer to 4-year n=23	Job-Related n=82	Personal Development n=63	Other n=21	
# OF SEMESTERS PLAN TO ATTEND							
1	30%	40%	11%	33%	40%	23%	26%
2	9	12	0	17	12	15	12
3	13	4	11	17	12	15	13
4	44	58	61	12	24	39	34
5	4	12	0	5	4	0	5
6-8	0	12	17	16	8	8	11
AVERAGE	2.8	4.0	4.0	3.0	2.7	3.1	3.2
# OF SEMESTERS ACTUAL ATTENDED							
1	50%	19%	30%	33%	30%	16%	30%
2	23	16	4	19	21	26	19
3	0	13	13	14	11	32	13
4	0	19	22	10	14	21	13
5	5	7	17	8	9	0	6
6-8	9	19	13	8	9	0	10
9 or More	14	7	0	10	9	5	8
AVERAGE	4.2	4.3	3.3	3.6	3.8	3.0	3.7

Non-Returning Student Interview Study
Distribution of Responses and Characteristics
by Purpose For Attending College

Interview Question/Student Characteristic	Students' Purpose for Attending College						TOTAL n=255
	Vocational Training n=31	A.A. Degree n=35	Transfer to 4-year n=23	Job-Related n=82	Personal Development n=63	Other n=21	
ARE YOU ATTENDING COLLEGE NOW?							
Not Attending	84%	83%	57%	90%	84%	100%	84%
Yes, Com Coll.	10	11	13	5	10	0	8
Yes, 4-Year	3	3	30	2	6	0	6
Yes, Other	3	3	0	2	0	0	2
ANY CLASSES TOO EASY OR TOO DIFFICULT?							
Yes, too easy	10%	11%	17%	11%	5%	11%	10%
Yes, too hard	10	11	13	7	11	0	9
WORK WHILE IN COLLEGE?							
Yes, < 21 hrs.	10%	17%	39%	13%	13%	10%	15%
Yes, 21-40 hrs.	71	74	44	70	68	65	67
No	19	9	17	17	19	25	18

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Distribution of Responses and Characteristics
by Purpose For Attending College

Interview Question/Student Characteristic	Students' Purpose for Attending College						TOTAL n=255
	Vocational Training n=31	A.A. Degree n=35	Transfer to 4-year n=23	Job-Related n=82	Personal Development n=63	Other n=21	
DID STUDENT ACCOMP WHAT HE/SHE INTENDED?							
Yes	52%	37%	61%	71%	79%	55%	64%
No	29	14	17	12	2	10	13
Partially	19	49	22	17	19	35	24
WHY DID YOU STOP ATTENDING COLL.?							
Fam./Pers. problems	10%	17%	17%	17%	18%	11%	16%
Work schedule	13	26	9	21	17	6	19
Attd. another coll.	0	9	35	11	8	0	10
Medical problems	7	14	0	16	10	6	13
Completed courses of personal interest	10	9	4	4	5	6	6
Too time-consuming	13	3	4	4	7	0	6
Class not available	10	0	4	11	12	17	10
Grad./compl.train.	10	17	9	4	17	11	11
Other	27	6	17	11	7	17	10

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Non-Returning Student Interview Study
Distribution of Responses and Characteristics
by Purpose For Attending College

Interview Question/Student Characteristic	Students' Purpose for Attending College						TOTAL n=255
	Vocational Training n=31	A.A. Degree n=35	Transfer to 4-year n=23	Job-Related n=82	Personal Development n=63	Other n=21	
WORKING NOW?							
Not working	23%	9%	22%	10%	18%	10%	15%
Yes, job related to studies	32	43	22	65	37	30	44
Yes, job partially related to studies	3	6	9	6	5	15	6
Yes, but not related to studies	42	43	48	20	41	45	35
WILL ATTEND RSC IN THE FUTURE?							
Yes	81%	74%	61%	67%	70%	75%	70%
No	10	17	26	16	8	5	14
Don't know	9	9	13	17	22	20	16
RECOMMEND RSC TO OTHERS?							
Yes	100%	97%	100%	98%	100%	90%	98%
No	0	3	0	0	0	10	1
Other	0	0	0	2	0	0	1

Non-Returning Student Interview Study
Distribution of Responses and Characteristics
by Purpose For Attending College

Interview Question/Student Characteristic	Students' Purpose for Attending College						TOTAL
	Vocational Training n=31	A.A. Degree n=35	Transfer to 4-year n=23	Job-Related n=82	Personal Development n=63	Other n=21	n=255
AT RSC OTHER THAN FOR CLASS?							
Never	58%	60%	41%	79%	73%	68%	68%
Once or twice	13	6	18	2	8	16	8
Three or four times	16	14	18	9	6	6	11
Frequently	13	20	23	10	11	11	13
RATE YOU EXPERIENCE ON SCALE OF 1-10:							
1 (lowest)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	10	3	0	5	3	5	4
6	3	3	9	9	8	11	7
7	13	23	13	13	8	16	14
8	37	22	48	44	31	37	37
9	20	14	30	14	23	21	19
10 (highest)	17	34	0	14	27	11	19
AVERAGE	8.0	8.5	8.0	7.9	8.4	7.9	8.1

Exit Interview Guide

1. Name_____, _____ 2. Telephone ( )_____
last first

2. Perm #_____ 4. Age_____ 5. Ethnicity_____
(1-5) (6-7) (8)

6. Educational objective_____ 7. Test scores_____ 8. GPA_____
(9) (1=yes,2=no) (10) (11-13)

9. # units completed_____ 10. 1st RSC semester_____ 11. Year____
(14-15) (16-18) (Fr=1/So=2/other=3)(19)

Contact Notes:_____

_____

****

Hi, my name is_____, and I'm calling from the Rancho Santiago College Research Office. We routinely call a sample of former students to ask them about their experiences at the College in order to make sure that we are doing the best job possible. May I ask you a few questions?

1. What was your primary purpose for attending college?

_____ ____
(20-21)

2. How many semesters did you plan to attend? ____
(22)

3. How many semesters did you actually attend? ____
(23)

4. Did you accomplish what you intended? ____
(1=yes 2=no 3=partially 4=other) (24)

5. <u>If "no" or "partially" to #4 above:</u>
Why weren't you able to accomplish your goal? ____
(25-26)

_____

_____

6. Why did you stop attending RSC? ____
(27-28)

_____

_____

7. Are you attending college now? If yes, where are you attending? ____
(1=not attending 2=community college 3=four-year college 4=other) (29)

_____

8. Were any of your classes at RSC too difficult for you? If yes, which ones? (1=yes 2=no) (30)
courses:_____ _____ _____

9. Were any of your courses too easy? If yes, which ones? (1=yes 2=no) (31)
courses:_____ _____ _____

10. What grades did you mostly receive? (1=A's 2=B's 3=C's 4=D's and F's 5=none 6=too mixed) (32)

11. Did you work while attending college? If "yes," part-time or full-time? (1=yes, 20 hours or fewer per week 2=yes, 21-40 hours per week 3=no) (33)

12. Are you working now? If yes, is your job related to what you studied at RSC? (1=not working 2=related 3=partially related 4=not related) (34)

13. Do you plan to return to RSC in the future? (1=yes 2=no 3=don't know) (35)

14. Would you recommend RSC to your own children or friends? (1=yes 2=no 3=other) (36)

15. What did you like about RSC? (37-38)

_____

_____

16. How can RSC improve? (39-40)

_____

_____

17. Did you come to the campus or stay on campus to do things other than attend classes, such as to use student services or the library or to talk to your instructors or something else? If yes, how often, once or twice, three or four times, or frequently? (41)
(1=never 2=once or twice 3=three or four times 4=frequently 5=other)

18. Overall, on a scale of one to ten, how do you rate your experience at RSC, with one being very unsatisfactory and ten being a very worthwhile experience? (42-43)

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